

## Skipper Recalls River Days

Reprinted by permission from the White Pass Container Route News (April 1972).

"You were the most important person in the world, standing there in the wheelhouse as the first boat of the season sailed into her berth at Dawson City, with all the townspeople waving and cheering."

"The community likely had used up its last box of fresh fruit, its last sack of vegetables. Groceries might be running short. And there was a need for new supplies of medicines.

"The school children were given a holiday to see the first boat of the season coming down-river; all the townsfolk turned up at the river bank."

This is how Capt. Bill Bromley described the highlight day of the year for masters and crew sailing the White Pass riverboats before the days of all-season highways and scheduled airliners.

Capt. Bromley, now retired to his native Victoria, can look back over a span of 31 years on the Yukon River—from the days when he was second mate on the old "Canadian" to the days when he brought the "Klondike" back to Whitehorse for the last time, to have her beached on the riverbank, replaced by truck and bus in a fast-changing world which puts convenience and economic factors ahead of sentiment.

While the arrival of the first boat of the season was a happy event for the people of Dawson, the sailing of the last ship of the season was an occasion marked with sadness.

You knew, always, when you left that some of the friends you had made over the years would be dead by the time you came back down-river in the spring, blasting your whistle to mark the awakening of a new year. And you left, in the fall, knowing that the coming winter was cut off from the rest of the world, save for the bush pilots who bumped in through air pockets in aircraft pieced together with baling wire to complete a mercy flight.

Those were big events on the river, days that Capt. Bromley always will remember. But the biggest thrill of his career on the river was the day he had Prince Philip aboard as a passenger for a five-hour sightseeing trip, a few months before "Klondike's" engines were silenced forever.



Prince Philip was the most famous passenger ever carried in Capt. Bromley's ship, but there were others, too: the Lord Mayor of London and Viscount Alexander. "Even back in 1924, most of our passengers were tourists," recalls Capt. Bromley. They would be mostly women. There were a lot of school teachers during the vacation months. And most of the passengers were Americans.

"The 'Klondike'" was a happy ship; there would be dances every night after the dining room waiters had cleared away the heavy silver coffee pots and silver cream jugs, the dinnerware and ornate flatware.

Going down river to Dawson was generally just a night's work, the boat taking only 36 hours, but fighting the currents on the return trip took four days. Rarely, a boat would get hung up on a sandbar for a few hours, and, sometimes, there was a gale a-blowing down Lake Laberge buffeting the boat so that the engineers kept a weather-eye cocked on the rigid steam pipes which were in danger of splitting as the shallow-draft vessel bobbed about.

The White Pass years were good years for Capt. Bromley. He had known coastal waters before he came North, and he now knows there's a greater challenge in piloting on the river, trying to "read" the river, watching for shifting sandbanks.

Victoria-born Capt. Bill Bromley first went to sea at the age of 16 in a whaling boat stationed at Naden Harbour in the Queen Charlotte Islands. Later, he joined a government hydrographic vessel, the "Lillooet", and then went into towboating. But it was riverboats that became his first love.

"The place I was made for it," he says. "In

my early days on the river I used to spend my off-duty hours on the bridge studying the river, to get to know where the sandbars were."

There was no chart-reading on that job.

In some parts of the river, the shoals changed with the years.

But despite the shifting shoals, there were few groundings.

"Perhaps five or six during the 19 years I was serving in the 'Klondike'", he recalls.

During the summer months, the river boats were kept on the move, back and forth continuously. There was a lot of cargo and passengers to move; and spending time on a sandbar in the middle of nowhere, even on a hot summer day, wasn't what the job called for.

In winter, the crews left the Yukon, leaving their boat in the hands of the supply yard men to float down the river until the ice broke up in the spring, and the boat was again floated, the silverware was polished, the decks repainted, and the great lattice-work of paddles chunked once again, carrying the first mail, the first cargo, the first passengers down river to Dawson City and way points.

## Craigflower Manor

Craigflower Manor in Victoria, B.C. was officially opened March 9, 1972 by Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and W. D. Black, Provincial Secretary of British Columbia.

The rehabilitation of the historic structure is a joint venture of the federal and provincial governments. Acquisition and restoration costs were shared by the two governments, and the province is responsible for ongoing operation and maintenance.

Craigflower Manor commemorates the transition from fur trade to settlement on the northwest coast. It was originally the focus of Craigflower Farm, one of four farms on Vancouver Island operated by the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company.

1 Expertly restored and furnished to the 1853-63 period, Craigflower Manor's first occupants were the Hudson's Bay Company. It is now open to the public year-round.

2 The 100-year-old Craigflower Manor is one of the finest examples of early domestic architecture. Built almost entirely of native materials in a simple colonial style, the manor houses embodies all the easy grace and elegance of rural living a century ago.



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## Boats with Bustles

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Preparing to pass through Five Finger Rapids, Yukon River, Y.T. The steamer at left front reaches to locate the wire to be used in the winch through the easterly (left-hand) channel. The upright spar (steering pole) is used to steady the boat in the narrow channel. The right-hand channel is used for iron-sight for the wheelhouse enabling the pilot to navigate accurately the narrow channels of which Five Finger Rapids is typical. Photo courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada



historic sites that plot the advent of Canadian history from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island.

Marine restoration since 1960 includes the reconstruction of a 17th century gunboat near Malloryton, Ontario and the preservation of a York boat (a typical Canadian craft used on inland waterways) presently on display at Lower Fort Garry in Manitoba. In centennial year, a major project was the reconstruction of *La Grande Hermine*—Jacques Cartier's flagship of 1535, now part of the Cartier-Brebœuf National Historic Park. By the latter part of 1974, the restoration of the *St. Roch*—historic conqueror of the Northwest Passage, will be complete. *S.S. Keno* and *S.S. Klondike* will form part of the extensive Klondike Goldrush International Historic Park—symbolizing the important role the stern-wheeled paddle-steamer.

The stern-wheeled paddle-steamer *S.S. Keno* at Dawson and *S.S. Klondike* at Whitehorse— are the property of the National Historic Sites Service and plans are well underway to restore them to their original condition of 1930 and 1937 respectively.

The restoration of boats is a relatively new move for the National Historic Sites Service. Only in the last twelve years have floating structures been considered of historic importance and been counted along with the more than 600 major and minor

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bolizing the important role the stern-wheeled

paddle-steamer played in the development of the north.

The paddle-wheeled riverboat is a typi-

cal North American vessel. Appearing on

the Mississippi River about 1817 where

they began their legendary association with

gold mining and gold.

They followed the gold rush to California and finally

their way to the Klondike towards the end

of the 18th century.

The Mississippi riverboats had their pad-

dlewheels on the side, about midships—

the boats that serviced the Yukon had their

wheels in the rear. The modifications were

